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SUBJECT: CANDIDATES FOR SERBIA'S PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

REF: 07 BELGRADE 1617

Summary  
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1. (U) Nine candidates submitted and met the requirements to run in Serbia's presidential elections, scheduled for January 20. The nine candidates include Radical Party deputy Tomas Nikolic; Serbia's President, Boris Tadic of the Democratic Party; Liberal Democratic Party head Cedomir Jovanovic; New Serbia party president Velimir Illic; and five candidates from smaller parties. Tadic and Nikolic are the real frontrunners, but Jovanovic and Illic will draw enough votes from both to guarantee a second round, in which Tadic still if likely to win. End Summary.

Final List of Candidates  
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2. (U) The Election Commission finalized the list of candidates on January 4 for the presidential elections scheduled for January 20. The nine candidates are Tomislav Nikolic (Serbian Radical Party), Boris Tadic (Democratic Party), Cedomir Jovanovic (Liberal Democratic Party), Velimir Illic (New Serbia), Milutin Mrkonjic (Socialist Party of Serbia), Milanka Karic (Serbian Strength Movement), Istvan Pastor (Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians), Jugoslav Dobricanin (Reformist Party), and Marijan Ristic (People's Peasant Party). The frontrunners are Nikolic and Tadic. Observers also expect Jovanovic and Illic to draw a significant number of votes. Below are biographies and expected campaign strategies of the four leading candidates.

Boris Tadic (Democratic Party)  
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3. (SBU) Boris Tadic is the head of the Democratic Party (DS) and the current President of Serbia. Tadic was born in 1958 in Sarajevo. Tadic worked as a journalist, clinical psychologist, psychology teacher, and researcher before becoming engaged in politics full-time. In 1990, he joined the Democratic Party (DS). Prior to winning the presidential election in 2004, Tadic served as a Member of Parliament, Minister of Telecommunications, and Minister of Defense. Srdjan Milivojevic, Member of Parliament and a member of DS's campaign committee, told poloff on December 20, 2007 that Kosovo and fulfilling obligations to The Hague would still be important themes in the campaign. DS intended to run a "clean" campaign, according to Milivojevic. In the same meeting, DS member Gordana Comic, Chair of Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee, said there would be "no new themes" in the campaign, but Tadic would run on his proven track record. Tadic would attract voters based on the party's continuous efforts to connect with the people and improve their quality of life. She assured poloff, however, that the DS would focus on a get out the vote campaign.

Tomislav Nikolic (Serbian Radical Party)  
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4. (U) Tomislav Nikolic is the deputy head of the Serbian Radical

Party (SRS), which he co-founded with party leader, and Hague War Crimes Tribunal defendant Vojislav Seselj in 1991. He has led the party since Seselj surrendered to the Hague in 2003. Nikolic was born in 1952 in Kragujevac, and studied civil engineering before beginning his career in construction. In 1992, 1998, and 2000, Nikolic was elected a Member of Parliament. In March 1998, Nikolic became Deputy Prime Minister of Serbia. In the 2000 presidential elections, Nikolic ran as the SRS candidate and placed third after Vojislav Kostunica and Milosevic. On December 24, 2007, Nikolic launched his current presidential campaign in his hometown, attracting about 6,000 supporters, mostly older, working class men. Nikolic's major campaign messages are anti-DS, anti-Western, and pro-Russian. At the rally, he accused the current government of selling off the state and argued for change of government.

Cedomir Jovanovic (Liberal Democratic Party)  
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15. (SBU) Cedomir (Ceda) Jovanovic, head of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), was born in 1971 in Belgrade. As one of the founders of the Democratic Opposition of Serbia, he was instrumental in bringing down Milosevic. Originally a member of DS, Jovanovic won a seat in the 2000 parliamentary elections. Jovanovic became Deputy Prime Minister in March 2003 after Prime Minister Djindjic's assassination. Jovanovic and his supporters split from the DS in 2005 to start LDP, which won 15 seats in the January 2007 elections. Vukosava Crnjanski, LDP's International Secretary, told poloff on December 21, 2007 that LDP's campaign, with the slogan "Life Rules," would focus on youth and minorities. In addition to LDP's traditional pro-western, pro-Kosovo independence platform, LDP's main campaign theme would be to differentiate itself from Tadic, whom the LDP views as a willing partner in the Kostunica government, Crnjanski said. LDP would have difficulty supporting Tadic in the election's second round, since Tadic had failed to live up to his promises from when he was first elected president, she said.

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16. (SBU) Jovanovic chose to start his campaign on an odd noted, using a fake U.S. Embassy "memo" to accuse a local tycoon of trying to sell Kosovo for a visa (reftel). This issue now is in Serbian courts, but appears to have bought Jovanovic the publicity he sought to pit himself against the "forces of corruption."

Velimir Ilic (New Serbia)  
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17. (U) Velimir Ilic is current Infrastructure Minister and leader of the New Serbia party, which is in coalition with the Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS). Born in 1951, in Cacak, central Serbia, Ilic started his career in construction, later establishing his own company. In 1990 he joined Vuk Draskovic's Serbian Renewal Movement (SPO). He formed the New Serbia party in 1998 after being expelled from the SPO. He was elected to the Serbian Parliament in 1993 and the Federal Parliament of Serbia and Montenegro in 2000. He was elected mayor of Cacak in 1996, reelected in 2000, and in 2003 won a seat in Parliament. He was appointed Minister of Capital Investments in 2004 and Minister of Infrastructure in May, 2007, a position he currently holds. As its coalition partner, the DSS announced on January 3 that it would support Ilic's candidacy. DSS Vice President Aleksandar Popovic told Charge on January 4, that his party was supporting Ilic "for the time being," leaving open the possibility that DSS could support Tadic in a second round.

And the Rest  
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18. (U) The five remaining candidates represent smaller parties, which are often regional or issue specific in their focus. Political observers expect them to garner few votes in the first round and to have little impact on the campaign. Milutin Mrkonjic is deputy of the Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS), Milosevic's former party. Born in 1942 and educated as a civil engineer, he currently serves as one of three Deputy Speakers of the Parliament. Milanka Karic is a member of the Serbian Strength Movement. She is the wife of party founder and telecommunications tycoon Bogoljub Karic, who

came in third in the 2004 presidential elections. Her husband is living in self-imposed exile while under indictment for corruption. The party has no seats in Parliament. Istvan Pastor is the head of the Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians and Secretary for Privatization in the regional government of Vojvodina. Jugoslav Dobricanin is Vice President of the Reformist Party, based in Nis. The Reformist Party finished last in the 2007 parliamentary elections with only 1,881 votes nationwide. Dobricanin, born in 1956 near Kursumlija, is a military historian. Marjan Risticevic is President of the People's Peasant Party and ran as its presidential candidate in 2004. He was born in 1958.

Comment

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19. (SBU) Despite a crowded field of candidates, the real competition will be between Nikolic and Tadic, with both Ilic and Jovanovic pulling enough votes to guarantee that a second round of voting will occur on February 3. Although Tadic will likely win in a second round, the first round will be tight. DSS's support of Ilic in the first round complicates Tadic's prospects, further fracturing the coalition government. DSS's support for Tadic in the second round will be critical. End Comment.

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